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The Appropriation of State Secularism by Catholics

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Abstract

We investigate the long-run evolution of Catholics' view on State secularism in France. We explore the roots of the opposition of Catholics to secularism that can be traced back as far as the 1789 French Revolution. We provide evidence that the divide between Catholics and supporters of secularism persisted throughout the 19th and early 20th Centuries, affecting votes on the major secularization Laws during the Third Republic. We argue that the dual French educational system, partitioned into Catholic and secular schools, may have contributed to this persistence. We then show that Catholics eventually became supporters of secularism in France, closing the political divide on the issue. However, this shift in opinion can be explained by Catholics viewing secularism as a way of limiting the influence of Islam. We argue that views about the involvement of Muslim/Catholic authorities in public debate are significant determinants of political supply in France. Last, we show that Catholics, who now support secularism, continue to exhibit different voting behavior and attitudes than Atheists (regarding women's rights and same-sex legislation).

JEL codes: Z12, K10, D72, O15.

Keywords: Secularism, cultural persistence, voting behavior, Catholicism.

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Introduction

The history of secularism has been punctuated by deep and often violent political divisions. The political history of France is no exception. The 1789 French Revolution, which forced clergymen to take an Oath to the newborn Republic and become civil servants, led to more than a century of major political confrontations. During the 19th Century, proponents and opponents of secularism repeatedly fought over a series of Laws that threatened the influence of the Catholic Church (for example, school and family reforms) that ultimately culminated in the effective separation of the Church and the State in 1905. However, one century later, the opposition of French Catholics to secularism seems to be much reduced or even completely absent. Electoral surveys indicate that French Catholics are now likely to vote for parties that actively promote secularism, and students in Catholic schools report strong support for the principles of *laïcité* (i.e. the separation of the Church and the State, the neutrality of the State towards religions, and freedom of religion).¹

This falling opposition to secularism among French Catholics has occurred in a context of diminishing religious practice, but where the Catholic Church continues to exert considerable influence. As in most Western countries, there has been a significant reduction in Catholic religiosity in France over the past century: the percentage of Catholics fell from 81% in the 1950s to 64% in 2010, together with Catholic religious practice.² One in four French people used to attend the weekly Sunday Mass in the 1950s, as compared to under one in twenty today. Despite this decline, the Catholic Church remains influential, and around half of the French consider Catholic values to be topical. One good illustration of this influence is the capacity of the Catholic Church to organize large-scale protests against political reforms, such as those against same-sex marriage legislation in the early 2010s, which involved over one million protesters.³

Our objective in this paper is to document and analyze the shift in the position of French Catholics regarding secularism. We first document the historical secular divide between the proponents and opponents of a secular State. To do so, we collect and analyze historical data from the 18th and 19th Centuries. The secular divide, which appeared or at least became much more salient during the French Revolution, significantly influenced French politics for more than a century. Using data previously collected by historians at the local level on the attitudes of the Clergy towards the new Republic, and collecting new data on the Clergy representatives who sat in the National Assembly during the French Revolution, we show how this secular divide generated (or at least was correlated with) the split of the country into Catholic and Republican areas. We also provide evidence that Parliamentary representatives from localities that were opposed to secularism during the French Revolution continued to be more likely to oppose secular laws one century later, by collecting data in archived records of votes in the National Assembly during the Third Republic (in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries). Following the literature on intergenerational value transmission, we show

¹The principles of *laïcité* were set out by the Third Republic's Law of the 9th of December 1905. These established the neutrality of the French State in religious matters and are considered as an important step towards secularism.

²Sources: *Le Catholicisme en France en 2010, and the 2010 IFOP survey*.

³Le Bras and Todd (2013) argue that Catholicism as a system of beliefs and ritual practices is dead, whereas Catholicism as a social force is vibrant. They call this life-after-death Catholicism 'Zombie Catholicism'.

that education might have played a decisive role in the persistence of this secular divide over long periods of time. We in addition exploit recent data published by a Catholic newspaper to construct a religiosity index capturing various measures of religious practice for Catholics in 2013. We find that the current spatial heterogeneity of religiosity in France maps well with the divide between Catholic and Republican Départements that appeared during the French Revolution.

Second, we explore the current views of French Catholics, and show that there is now substantial support for secular values. We measure students' attitudes towards secularism in schools, comparing the views of pupils in secular/public and Catholic/private schools, using data from a recent large-scale secularism survey conducted in 2018 by CNESCO (N=16,000 pupils). Pupils in Catholic schools have similar views on secularism to pupils in secular schools. We expand the analysis to the adult population by running our own survey on attitudes toward secularism from a representative sample of the French population (N=2,000). The attitudes of French Catholics and Atheists towards secularism are similar, with both groups being strongly supportive of secularism in France.

Third, we investigate whether this current support for secularism by French Catholics is unconditional, or whether it is rather self-serving (with a stricter enforcement of secularism rules for religions other than Catholicism). To do so, we design a survey experiment in which we randomly allocate our representative sample of the French population to a questionnaire assessing their support for secularism targeting either Catholicism or Islam (i.e. a between-subject design). Our experiment provides causal estimates showing that Catholics are significantly more likely to support secularism when Islam is targeted as compared to Catholicism. French Atheists support a more balanced enforcement of secularism across religions (with the exception of Priest/Imam appointments).

Fourth, we show that, despite the current support of Catholics for secularism, significant differences remain in voting behavior and values between religious groups. Our analysis of electoral studies shows that Catholics are significantly less likely to vote for Left-wing parties than are Atheists, and more likely to vote for Right-wing parties. Using our survey data, we show that Catholics' votes are consistent with their perception of the preferences of the candidates regarding the involvement of Catholic authorities in public debate. Using post-electoral studies, we last show that values with respect to homosexuality, women, traditions, minorities and migrants differ greatly across religious groups. This suggests that while Catholics and Atheists support secularism, their underlying values and motivations differ significantly.

Our work contributes to the related literature in a number of ways. First, from a methodological perspective, it combines the analysis of historical data with the use of experimental methods to discuss and reveal long-term changes in political preferences across social groups. Second, our paper contributes to the growing body of work on the cultural evolution of societies (Nunn, 2020) and its relationship to economic development and institutional evolution (Nunn, 2009, 2012). We document how historically-polarized concepts can be reappropriated by historical opponents over time. Third, our discussion relates to recent investigations into the influence of religion on political preferences and voting behavior (e.g., Iyer (2016); Scheve and Stasavage (2006); Huber and Stanig (2011)). Although religion was and still is a major determinant of voting in France, Catholics used

to exhibit greater opposition to the secular Republic, but are now more likely to support secularism. Fourth, this work also relates to the political science literature in France on the history of French secularism (laïcité) (e.g., Baubérot (2021); Raynaud (2019); Portier (2018)). Last, we contribute to research into the social and geographic determinants of voting behaviors in France (e.g., Siegfried (1913); Bois (1960); Piketty and Cagé (2023)). We underline that religion may still play a significant role in French politics, where the population perceives large differences in the positions of current political parties with respect to the role of religion in public debate.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 1 documents and analyzes the historical secular divide in France between the proponents and opponents of secularism since the French Revolution. Section 2 assesses the current support of French Catholics for secularism, and provides causal estimates for a self-serving view of secularism among Catholics. Section 3 shows that, while the secular divide has vanished over time, there are still significant differences in voting behavior, partly driven by the positions of the candidates toward the role of religion in public debate and the different underlying values of voters. Last, Section 4 concludes.

1 The historical divide between the Church and the secular State

Competition between the temporal power held by French secular institutions and the spiritual power in the hands of the Catholic Church is deeply rooted in French history. Dating back to the opposition between King Philip the Fair (1285-1314) and Pope Boniface VIII (1295-1303), a political and religious doctrine, called Gallicanism, emerged to govern the organization of the Catholic Church independently of the Pope's authority. The Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438) and the Concordat of Bologna (1516) were attempts to enforce the principles of Gallicanism and regulated the relationships between the French Monarchy and the Catholic Church up to the French Revolution. According to the Concordat, the King of France appointed the clergymen to the highest benefices (Archbishops, Bishops and Abbots) while the Pope had the right of canonical inauguration for church officers. The French Revolution broke this balance of power between the secular and the religious authorities. The newly-elected Parliament forced clergymen to take the Oath to the Republic, which deeply divided France into the supporters of the Church and those of the Republic. This division lasted over the two following centuries, and reached its peak during the secularization Laws of the Third Republic (1870-1940).

1.1 The 1791 Oath to the Republic

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy (July 12th 1790) that resulted from the French Revolution dealt a blow to the pre-existing balance of power between the Monarchy and the Catholic Church in the *Ancien Régime*. The Constituent Assembly enacted the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which aimed to subordinate the French Catholic Church to the French State through a series of measures: religious geographical units were redesigned to align with the administrative units, Priests were to be paid by the State itself, some types of clergy positions (*chanoines*, *chapelains* and *vicaires*)

were eliminated, and Bishops and Priests were appointed after an approval vote by local secular assemblies. According to Tackett (1986), almost three-fifths of clergymen in 1789 lost their positions after the enactment of the Civil Constitution, and their revenues were substantially reduced.

The Clergy opposed the Civil Constitution and, more globally, any attempt to subordinate the Church to the State. To hold back protest against the Civil Constitution, the Constituent Assembly in January 1791 required parish clergymen to swear a solemn oath of allegiance to the Nation, the Law, the King, and the new revolutionary constitution (henceforth the Oath). Clergymen who refused to take the Oath risked losing their position and their revenue and being replaced according to the prescribed procedures. By the end of Summer 1791, seven Bishops had complied and about 55 percent of parish clergymen had sworn the Oath (Tackett, 1986). The 1791 Oath split the French Church into two camps: sworn/constitutional priests who recognized the supremacy of the State, and non-sworn/refractory clergymen who opposed the subordination of the clergy to the State.

This secular divide was also geographical, as depicted in Figure 1 using the data from Tackett (1986) (with current geographical units and separating the units into quartiles).⁴ Non-sworn priests were dominant in the West (Brittany, Normandy, *Anjou* and *Aquitaine*), some *Départements* in the Southern part of the *Massif Central*, some Northern *Départements* (*Nord* and *Lorraine*), and the *Franche-Comté Département*. By contrast, the *Bassin Parisien* (Paris and neighboring *Départements*), the Center (*Poitou* and *Berry*) and South-East (the Alps and Mediterranean *Départements*) were characterized by high percentages of sworn priests.

The geographical split between the constitutional and refractory Church was also reflected in the French Parliament. The National Constituent Assembly was composed of three groups of representatives: clergy (331), aristocracy (319), and commoners (665). As members of the Church, the clergy representatives were also required to take the Oath. To explore whether the preferences of clergymen at the local level to take the Oath were reflected in political behavior, we collected data on the Clergy representatives' decision to take the Oath. To do so, we consulted the biography of each clergy representative from the *Dictionnaire des Constituants : 1789-1791* (Lemay, 1991). We dropped representatives who died, resigned, or emigrated before the Oath, and those whose elections were canceled. We distinguish three types of clergy representatives: those who took the Oath, those who refused, and those for whom the information is missing. Among the 331 sitting clergymen, 111 took the Oath between December 27th 1790 and January 4th 1791. We then regressed this decision to take the Oath at the individual level on the share of priests who took the Oath in the *Département* where the representative was elected. The results appear in Table 1, and show that the clergy representatives were significantly less likely to take the Oath when a higher share of priests in their electoral district refused to do so.

The various revolutionary governments of the early 1790s took harsh measures against the refractory Church, which was viewed as counter-revolutionary. During the 'Reign of Terror' (1792-1793), acts of extreme violence were committed against clergymen (e.g., the September massacres

⁴Some geographical units had to be merged to fit the historical and current administrative structures. We refer to these merged regions as 'supra-Départements' in the remainder of the article.

Table 1: Regression of the decision of the Clergy representatives in the National Constituent Assembly to take the 1791 Oath on the proportion of non-sworn priests in their electoral district.

	OLS	Logit	Multinomial Logit	
			No Oath	No Info
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Non-sworn priests	-0.192** (0.0957)	-1.466* (0.771)	1.489* (0.783)	-0.967 (0.783)
Observations	243	243	289	
Number of clusters	68	68	68	

Notes: (1) The first column corresponds to a linear regression of the decision to take the Oath vs. not taking the Oath (excluding individuals with missing information). The second column corresponds to a logistic regression. The third column shows the results of a multinomial logit where we included individuals with missing information (baseline group: Oath takers).

(2) The figures here are the estimated coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses clustered at the supra-Département level.

(3) * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

in Paris in 1792, and mass executions in other French cities such as Nantes, Lyon, Orléans and Rochefort). The uprising in Vendée against the Revolutionary government in March-December 1793 epitomized the divide between constitutional and refractory France. This eventually degenerated into civil war and violent repression by the Revolutionary government, leading to over 240,000 deaths (170,000 Vendée soldiers and civilians, and 70,000 Republican soldiers, Coquard (2012)). Overall, the 1791 Oath appears to have been a major event in the long-term divide between secular and Catholic France (Furet and Ozouf, 2007), which broke the balance of power between secular and religious authorities.

1.2 The political conflict over the secularization laws during the Third Republic (1870-1940)

The secular divide that emerged during the French Revolution persisted throughout the 19th Century. During the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, the Third French Republic opposed the Catholic Church by passing flagship secularization laws, and the conflict between the two institutions reached its peak. These laws aimed to diminish the influence of the Catholic Church in educational institutions (the Laws of 28th March 1882, 30th October 1886, and 7th July 1904), family institutions (the Law of 27th July 1884) and associations (the Law of 1st July 1901), and enforced *laïcité* principles (the Law of 9th December 1905). The Appendix provides more details on each of these Laws. As the founding fathers of the Third Republic recognized, these continued the secularization process that was initiated during the 1789 Revolution. Jules Ferry, the Minister of Public Instruction, stated in the debates on secular and mandatory education that "The secularization of the civil power and of all social institutions [...] is the regime under which we have lived since 1789."⁵

The opposition between Republicans and Catholics was stark, as these Laws set out profound

⁵Cited from Portier, 2018, p. 12.

changes in the fabric of French society, which was still heavily influenced by Catholicism. According to official censuses in the mid-1870s, over 35 million of the 36 million French were considered to be Catholics; the remaining citizens were Protestants (under 60,000), Jews (50,000) or free-thinkers (80,000) (Weber, 1976).

To assess the political divide over secularism at that time, and its persistence since the French Revolution, we collected data on the votes of the Deputies of the National Assembly on the secularization laws. We manually extracted the votes of the Deputies from the archives of the French National Assembly (via scans of historical records). We analyzed the persistence of the political divide between Catholics and Republicans by regressing the Deputies' votes on the secularization laws of the late 1880s and early 1900s on the share of non-sworn priests in 1791 in their electoral district.

The results displayed in Table 2 show a strong persistence of the religious-political divide over a century after the Revolution. There is a strong and significant negative correlation between the proportion of non-sworn priests in 1791 in the Deputy's *Département* and his decision to vote in favor of the secular law. Deputies from areas with strong local opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy one century earlier were significantly less likely to vote for mandatory and secular schooling (the Law of 28th March 1882), divorce re-legalization (the Law of 27th July 1884), secularization of teachers (the Law of 30th October 1886), stronger requirements for religious congregations (the Law of 1st July 1901), the abolition of teaching by congregations (the Law of 7th July 1904), and last the separation of Church and State (the Law of 9th December 1905). The estimates indicate that Deputies from an area with 10 percentage points more non-sworn priests a century earlier were on average 6 percentage points less likely to vote in favor of the Law for the separation of the Church and the State. Even after excluding Paris, the electoral district with the largest number of Deputies, the correlation remains significantly negative.

Table 2: Correlation between the votes of Deputies during the Third Republic and the share of non-sworn priests in 1791 in the electoral district.

	1882 Law	1884 Law	1886 Law	1901 Law	1904 Law	1905 Law
Correlation						
Non-sworn priests	-0.256***	-0.349***	-0.531***	-0.285***	-0.280***	-0.290***
Probit ME						
Non-sworn priests	-0.494***	-0.649***	-1.202***	-0.611***	-0.608***	-0.615***
	(0.152)	(0.128)	(0.248)	(0.118)	(0.139)	(0.115)
N	399	407	468	459	474	509
Probit ME excluding Paris						
Non-sworn priests	-0.464***	-0.632***	-1.177***	-0.598***	-0.664***	-0.632***
	(0.157)	(0.136)	(0.255)	(0.124)	(0.146)	(0.124)
N	376	376	436	415	426	453

Notes: (1) For the probit regressions, the figures shown are the estimated marginal effects, with standard errors in parentheses clustered at the supra-Département level.

(2) * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

Table 3: Regression of the share of primary students in secular public schools in the 19th Century on the share of non-sworn priests in 1791 at the supra-Département level.

	Share of students in secular schools			
	1850	1863	1867	1877
Non-sworn priests	-0.097 (0.065)	-0.136** (0.066)	-0.148** (0.066)	-0.137*** (0.033)
Observations	71	71	71	71
R-squared	0.035	0.062	0.072	0.207

OLS estimations. The figures here are the estimated effects, with standard errors in parentheses. * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

1.3 The secular divide in the educational system

The educational system is likely to have played a major role in the persistence of the secular divide by perpetuating the Catholic vs. Republican division. The educational system in France has indeed been a battleground between the Republic and the Catholic Church, with the three Laws on educational reform (1882, 1886 and 1904) representing the peak of this opposition. Historically, the Catholic Church played a critical role in the French educational system. Before the secularization of schools during the Third Republic, the Catholic Church was responsible for religious instruction in all schools, and many schools employing Catholic teachers were funded by the State. In 1886, the French State enacted a Law to progressively replace Catholic by secular teachers in publicly-funded schools (the Law of 30th October 1886). However, even after the reform the private Catholic school system retained considerable influence, and many parents opted for Catholic education. We now illustrate how the geographical divide between sworn and non-sworn *Départements* was reflected in the opposition of public and private schools at the *Département* level. We first retrieved the share of students attending secular schools at the *Département* level for a number of years in the 19th Century (1850, 1863, 1867 and 1877) (source: *La Statistique Générale de la France*). Linear regressions show that pupil enrollment in secular schools in the 19th Century was lower in areas with a larger share of non-sworn priests in 1791 (Table 3). In other words, *Départements* that historically opposed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had, in the following decades, a higher enrollment rate in Catholic schools, which is likely to have contributed over the century to the persistence of Catholic values and the opposition to the Republic.

More-recent data also show that these geographical differences in Catholic-school enrollment have persisted up to the present. Considering 2000 and 2010 enrollment data, we find that the recent share of primary-school students in secular schools is negatively correlated with the share of non-sworn priests in 1791 (Table 4). In other words, the current geographical *Département* map of Catholic-school enrollment continues to reflect the 1791 distribution of the support for the Civil Constitution.

These results are in line with Franck and Johnson (2016), who show that the four-fold increase in public spending on secular education between 1875 and 1902 did not have a substantial impact

Table 4: Regression of the share of primary students in secular public schools in the 21st Century on the share of non-sworn priests in 1791 at the supra-Département level.

Year	$\hat{\beta}$	Std. error	R-squared	Obs
2009	-.249***	.046	.292	74
2010	-.249***	.046	.292	74
2011	-.249***	.046	.293	74
2012	-.249***	.046	.293	74
2013	-.249***	.045	.295	74
2014	-.246***	.045	.293	74
2015	-.245***	.045	.293	74
2016	-.244***	.045	.291	74
2017	-.244***	.045	.292	74
2018	-.241***	.045	.288	74
2019	-.239***	.044	.287	74
2020	-.239***	.044	.285	74

OLS estimations. The figures here are the estimated coefficients and standard errors. * significant at 10%, ** significant at 5%, *** significant at 1%.

on Catholic-school enrollment. In particular, using the data from Tackett (1986) on the 1791 Oath and data on revolutionary violence among the local population, they show that Catholic enrollment was particularly resilient in *Départements* where violent repressions against Catholics occurred. As recent research suggests that State-funded educational spending is the main channel through which the State contributes to secularization (Franck and Iannaccone, 2014), we claim that the persistent divide between Catholic and secular schooling was a fundamental driver of the intergenerational transmission of religious practices as well as its geographical divide.⁶

1.4 Current religious practices: the persistence of the secular divide

The religious educational system is likely to have perpetuated the secular divide that came into being with the Oath during the French Revolution.⁷ To illustrate this persistence, we collected data on Catholic religious practice in France in 2013.⁸ This includes: the proportion of baptized children, the proportion of elementary students enrolled in private schools, the number of *confirmations* per 10,000 inhabitants, the number of priests per 10,000 inhabitants, the number of deacons (i.e., *diacres*) per 10,000 inhabitants, and the proportion of heterosexual marriages that are celebrated at church (see Table A1 for more details).

⁶Cohen-Zada (2006) provides evidence from US data that parents send their children to religious schools in order to preserve their religious identity.

⁷The canon Boulard (1898-1977) pioneered historical research on the geographical divide of Catholic practices in France: see Cuchet (2018) for a presentation of his work.

⁸Most of the data were collected from a series of online maps published in the French Catholic newspaper *La Croix*. See :

<https://web.archive.org/web/20181108105152/https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Actualite/baptisms-mariages-pretres-1-Eglise-de-France-en-cartes-2014-06-06-1190969>.

Religious practice is geographically heterogeneous, as shown in the summary statistics in Table A2. For example, the proportion of baptized children varied from 9% in *Seine-Saint-Denis* to 61% in *Vendée* in 2013. Similarly, approximately one out of 20 elementary students was enrolled in a private school in *Seine-Saint-Denis* (4.8%) in 2013, while this figure was almost 50% in *Vendée*. There are also significant differences with respect to the presence of the Catholic Church. For instance, the Church had about 0.23 priests and 0.17 deacons per 10,000 inhabitants in *Seine-Saint-Denis*, as against analogous figures of 1.63 and 0.66 in *Vendée* in 2013. In Table A3 there is a large positive correlation between these variables, suggesting a strong connection between the sacraments of the Catholic Church (baptisms, confirmations and marriages) and the distribution of the Church's employees (priests and deacons).

We then carry out a Principal Component Analysis to identify the underlying factors of Catholic religiosity: the results appear in Table A4. The first dimension, which explains half of the variations observed in the data for religious practice, is positively correlated with all variables. Areas with high scores on this first dimension have a larger proportion of sacraments (baptisms, confirmations and marriages), Church employees (priests and diacres), and young children in private schools. We call this first dimension the *Religiosity Index*.

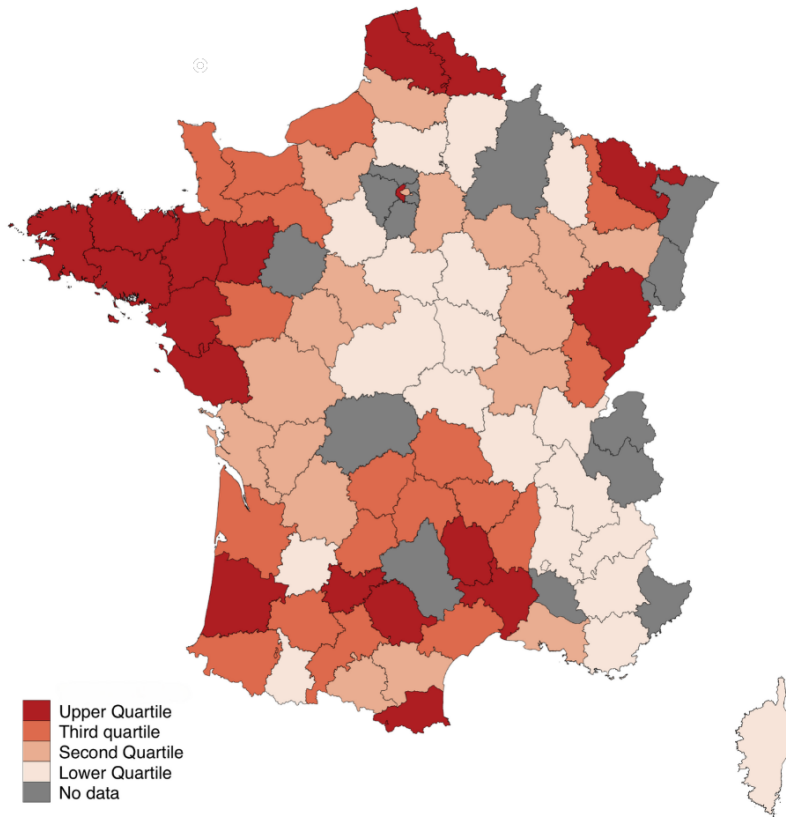
The two maps in Figure 1 depict the percentage of non-sworn priests in 1791 and the Religiosity Index in 2013. These two indicators are positively correlated ($\hat{\rho} = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$). Brittany and the Southern part of France are the two largest regions with substantial religious practice in 2013 and a high proportion of non-sworn priests in 1791. On the contrary, there are two diagonals of areas with limited religious practice and a low rate of non-sworn priests: the first starts on the West coast in the middle of France and ends in Lorraine, and the second starts in the English Channel and crosses France down to Italy.

The positive association between religiosity in 2013 and the proportion of non-sworn priests in 1791 continues to hold controlling for current economic conditions (the 2014 log wage, and the 2015 activity rate) in a linear regression ($p < 0.001$). We obtain similar results when we regress each component of the Religiosity Index on the proportion of non-sworn priests, controlling for current economic activity. The association is positive for all measures and statistically significant for four out of six, as shown in Appendix Table A5.⁹

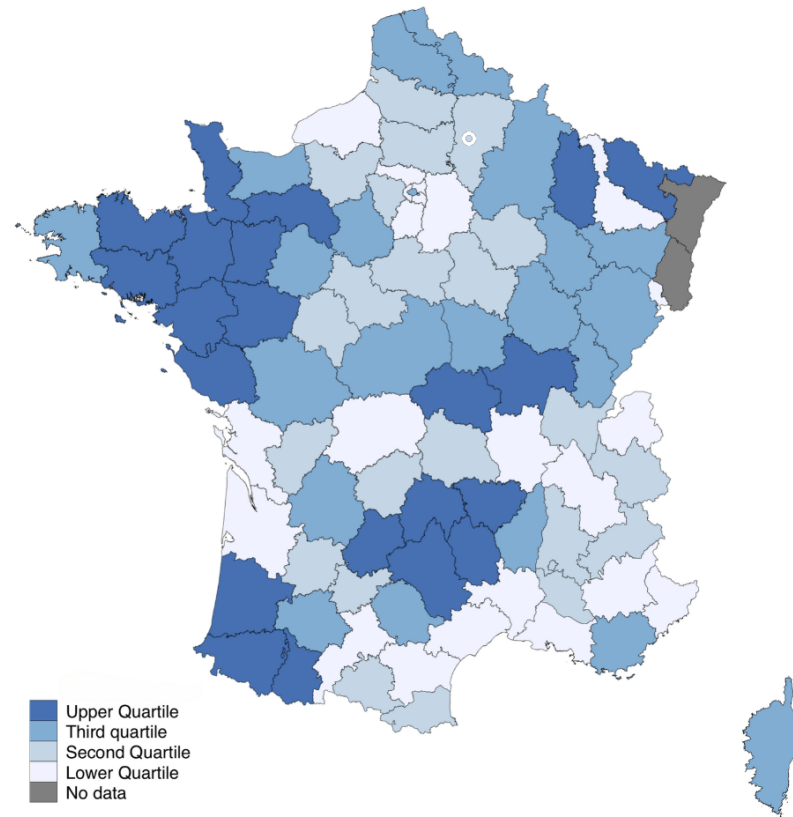
⁹It could be argued that the geographical religious-political divide of 1791 would vanish over time due to the internal migrations that have occurred in France over the two last centuries. However, the migration patterns in France over the 19th Century reveal little inter-*Départements* migration and substantial intra-*Départements* migration: under 20 percent of migration flows were inter-*Départements* but 70 percent within *Départements* (Bourdieu et al., 2000; Daudin et al., 2019).

Figure 1: Maps of France: The share of non-sworn priests in 1791 and the Religiosity Index in 2013

Percentage of non-sworn priests in 1791



Intensity of religious practise in 2013



2 Current Catholic support for secularism

The above discussion has shown that the secular divide that appeared in France during the French Revolution has persisted over time. This opposition has deeply affected French politics (e.g., during the secularization Laws of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries) and continues to be reflected in the current geographical diversity of religious practice in France. While the divide originated and persisted as the opposition to the secularization of the French State, we below investigate whether this opposition continues to play a role today.

2.1 What do the young generations think about secularism?

First, we discussed above how education, and especially religious schools, may have helped to perpetuate the secular divide in France. The question of the choice between secular and Catholic education continues to be posed, and is at the heart of the debate on the separation between the Church and the State.¹⁰ Comparing the attitudes of the most-recent generation of students in private and public schools can therefore inform us about the persistence of the divide.

We compare attitudes using data from the *Ecole et Citoyenneté* survey, which was carried out in 2018 by CNESCO¹¹ together with Sciences-Po Saint-Germain-en-Laye, the University of Nice Sophia-Antipolis, the Institute of Education (London) and the University of Geneva. This was the first nationwide survey to assess students' attitudes towards the principles of *laïcité*. The survey was administered online and sent to 16,000 students in Secondary schools (aged 14-15) and High schools (aged 17-18). The sample came from a random selection of religious and secular institutions (see the CNESCO Report, 2020, for more details). The *Ecole et Citoyenneté* survey consists of three survey waves. Here, we use the third, covering students' views about *laïcité*.

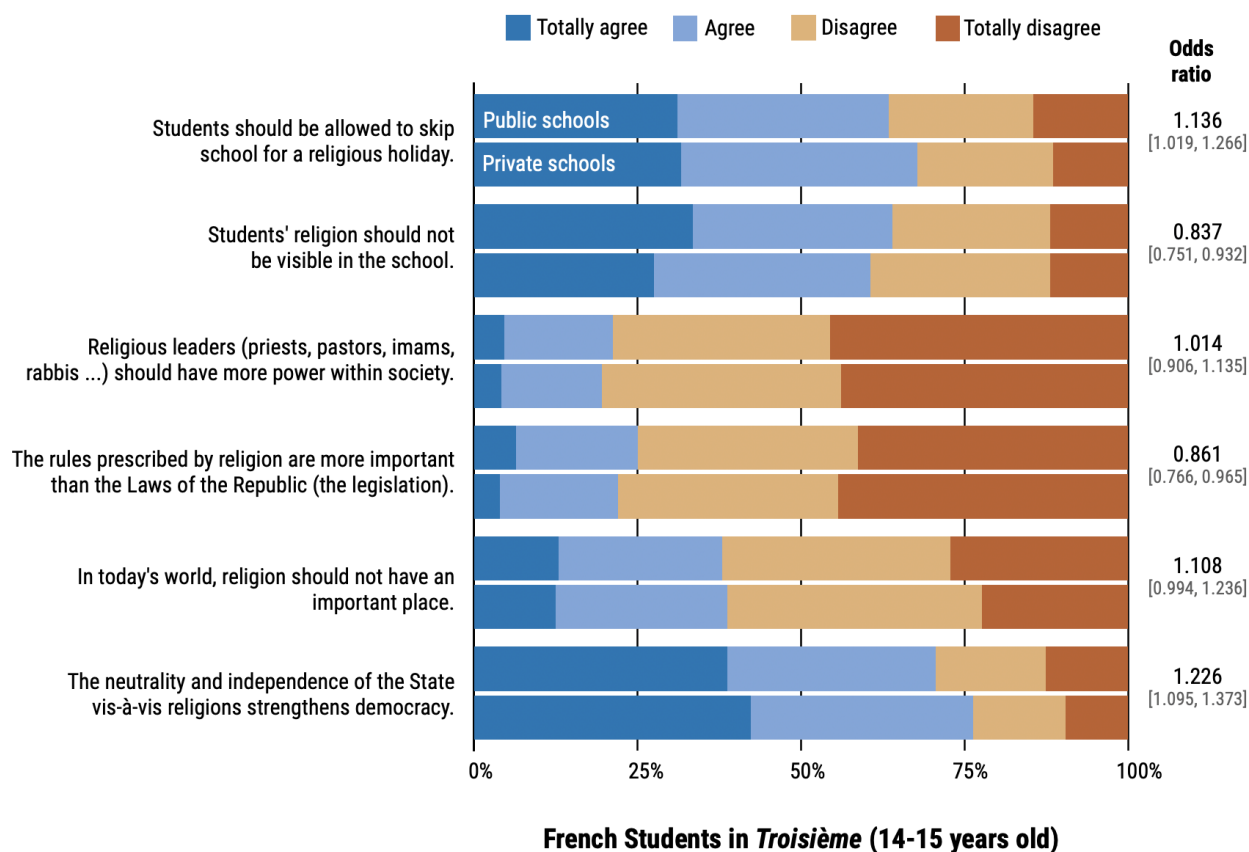
Figure 2 shows the distribution of answers to the six questions on the relationship between religion and the State by type of school (public vs. private). We can first see that overall there is little difference between the students in religious and secular schools. The right-hand side of Figure 2 lists the odds ratios corresponding to the odds of answering 'Totally Agree' and 'Agree' to the statement in question given the respondent is in a private rather than a public school. The effect sizes are small and all below 1.3. As such, the secular divide is only narrow between these two groups of students at the age of 15.

Second, students in private schools are more likely to justify student absence for religious reasons (the odds ratio is 1.136, and does not include 1 in the 95% confidence interval). They are also less likely to say that the religion of students should not be visible in the school (with an odds ratio

¹⁰The most-recent manifestation opposing the proponents of secular teaching and the defenders of religious education at school dates back to 1984. Alain Savary, the Minister of Education of the Socialist government, planned a Law aimed at integrating private schools into a large public education administration. Advocates of private schooling saw this project as a threat to the freedom of choice of education. This led to large protests culminating in the June 24th 1984 demonstration that brought together millions of people in Paris (2 million/800,000 according to the organizers/police: see *Wikipedia: Mouvement de l'école libre de 1984*). The planned project was abandoned and the existing government resigned.

¹¹The *Centre national d'étude des systèmes scolaires* (CNESCO) is a French research center for the analysis of educational systems.

Figure 2: The opinions of French 14-15 year-old students about the relationship between religion and the State (CNESCO)



Note: Frequencies are weighted by sample weights calculated by the CNESCO statistical team. The odds ratios come from weighted ordered logit estimations with robust standard errors. The associated 95% confidence intervals appear in brackets. The sample consists of 7,519 students from public schools and 1,833 students from private schools. Source: CNESCO. Authors' own calculations.

of 0.837). This shows their relatively stronger attachment to religion. In the remaining questions, private-school students report greater support for the State over religion regarding religious rules being more important than the laws of the Republic (odds ratio=0.861), and the neutrality and independence of the State with respect to religions strengthen democracy (odds ratio=1.226). Last, the answers to questions regarding religious leaders and the place taken by religion in today's world are similar between the two groups.

The same questions were asked to 18-year-old French students. Here there are even smaller gaps between private- and secular-school students. Except for two questions (religious vs. secular laws, and the power of religious leaders), the odds ratios are closer to 1. Furthermore, the value of one appears in all of the confidence intervals (see Appendix Figure B1), so that there are no statistically-significant difference in the views of the two groups at the 5% level.

These results suggest that students from private schools are more inclined to support religion within school institutions, but do not differ from their public-school counterparts in their opinions

towards *laïcité* in society as a whole. This was also the conclusion reached in the CNESCO report: although private-school students adhere to the *laïcité* principles in the public sphere as much as do secular-school students, they find it important for students to be allowed to express their religious beliefs and opinions at school and to be absent in order to attend a religious ceremony (CNESCO Report, 2020).

2.2 Catholics' and Atheists' views on secularism

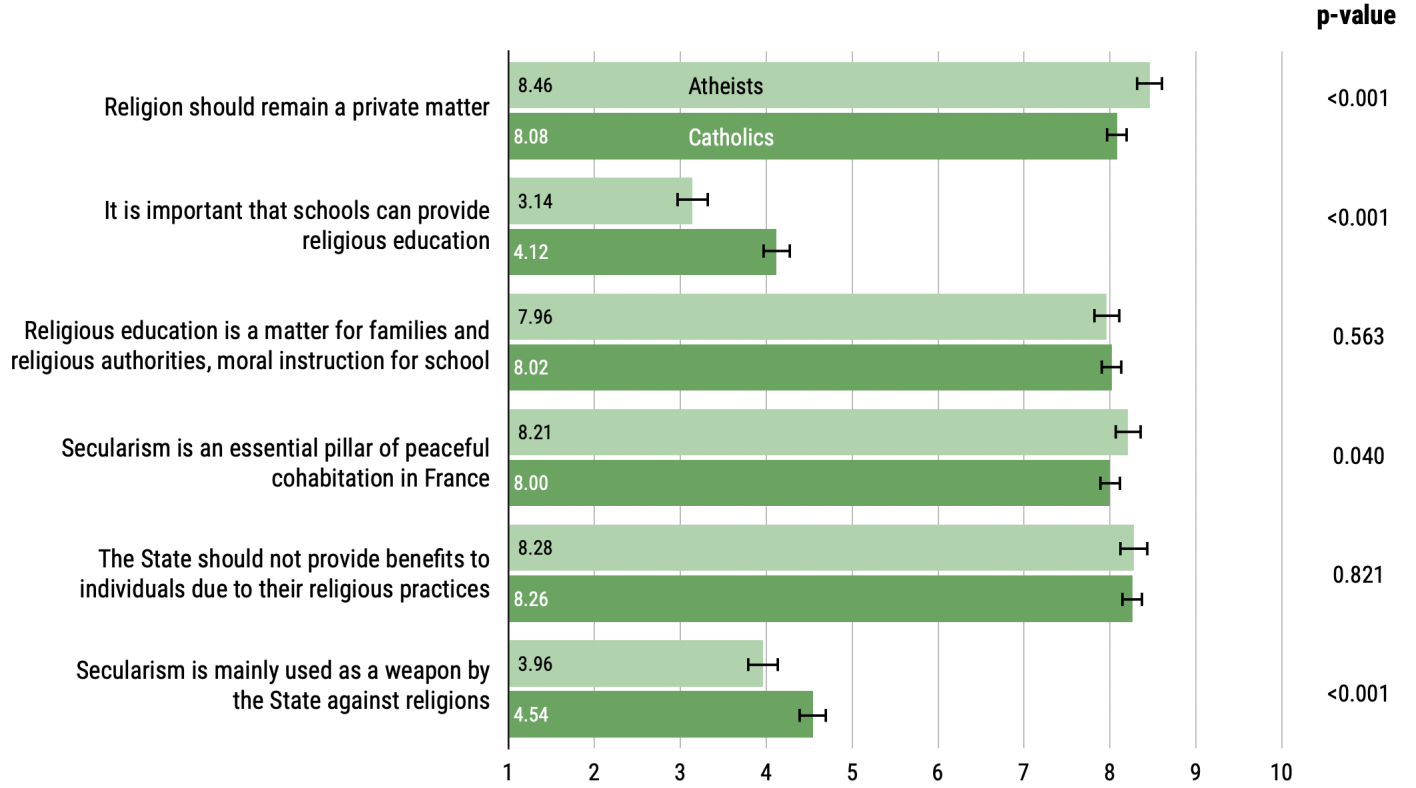
Although the CNESCO survey provides interesting information on the opinions regarding secularism of a large sample of students, it does not cover respondents' religious beliefs: Some students may attend private Catholic schools to benefit from a better education without being Catholic themselves. To better identify the connection between religious beliefs and the opposition to a secular State (Catholics' vs. Atheists' views), we conducted an online survey on a representative sample of 2,000 French adults in December 2020, collected by the OpinionWay survey firm. The questionnaire asked participants about their religion, their views on the relationship between the State and religion, the involvement of religion in public matters, and their perception of political parties' positions on the implication of religious authorities in public debates. The survey questions are listed in Appendix D.

Figure 3 depicts the average opinions of French Atheists and Catholics regarding the relationship between religion and the State in general. There is overall a relatively high level of support among Catholics for secularism in France. On the 1-to-10 Likert scale, Catholics mostly agree that religion should remain a private matter (8.08), that religious instruction is a matter for the family and religious authorities (8.02), secularism is an essential pillar of peaceful cohabitation in France (8.00), and the State should not provide benefits to individuals due to their religion (8.26). Second, there are some statistical differences between Atheists and Catholics but these are only small. Only one statistically-significant difference is about one point in size: Catholics agree significantly more that it is important for schools to be allowed to provide religious education. This result echoes the findings of the CNESCO survey. The other differences reveal that Catholics are less likely to think that religion is a private matter, and more likely to say that secularism is used as a weapon of the State against religion.

These results confirm that Catholics and Atheists have converged toward a general support for secularism, as the CNESCO study suggested, in contrast to the historical secular divide. However, we hypothesized that views about secularism might depend on the religion in question. We thus randomly assigned participants to one of two treatment conditions: each version of the questionnaire contained the same questions but differed with respect to the religion considered. One version contained questions that explicitly mentioned Catholicism, while the other explicitly referred to Islam (the second most-important religion in France).

The results show that there are significant differences in the support for secularism depending on the religion in question. This can be shown by interacting the treatment variable (whether the questionnaire focused on Catholicism or Islam) with the respondent's religion. This will reveal

Figure 3: Opinions of a representative French adult sample (Catholics and Atheists) regarding the relationship between religion and the State



Note: The sample contains 759 Atheists and 1,004 Catholics. The scores are reported on a 1-to-10 Likert scale. Weighted means and standard errors use the polling institute's sample weights for representativeness. P-values obtained from a weighted linear model.

whether respondents have a universal view of secularism (i.e. the equal treatment of religions regarding relations with the State) or if they think that secularism should apply more to one religion than to others.

Formally, we consider the following econometric model:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 C_i + \beta_C C_i \times T_i + \beta_A (1 - C_i) \times T_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where C_i is a dummy for the respondent being a Catholic (taking on a value of 0 if the respondent is an Atheist), T_i is a treatment dummy for the respondent answering the questionnaire with *Islam* instead of *Catholicism*, and ϵ_i is an i.i.d. random error term.

In the above, the β_C (respectively β_A) coefficient reflects the degree to which Catholics (resp. Atheists) are more likely to agree with the statement when it refers to Islam rather than Catholicism. If this coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero ($H_0 : \beta_k = 0$), respondents from this religious group ($k = \{C, A\}$) evaluate secularism differently for Islam and Catholicism. We further test whether this bias (if any) is the same for Catholics and Atheists ($H_0 : \beta_C = \beta_A$). Figure 4

presents the opinions of Catholics and Atheists regarding the involvement of Catholicism or Islam in the public sphere.

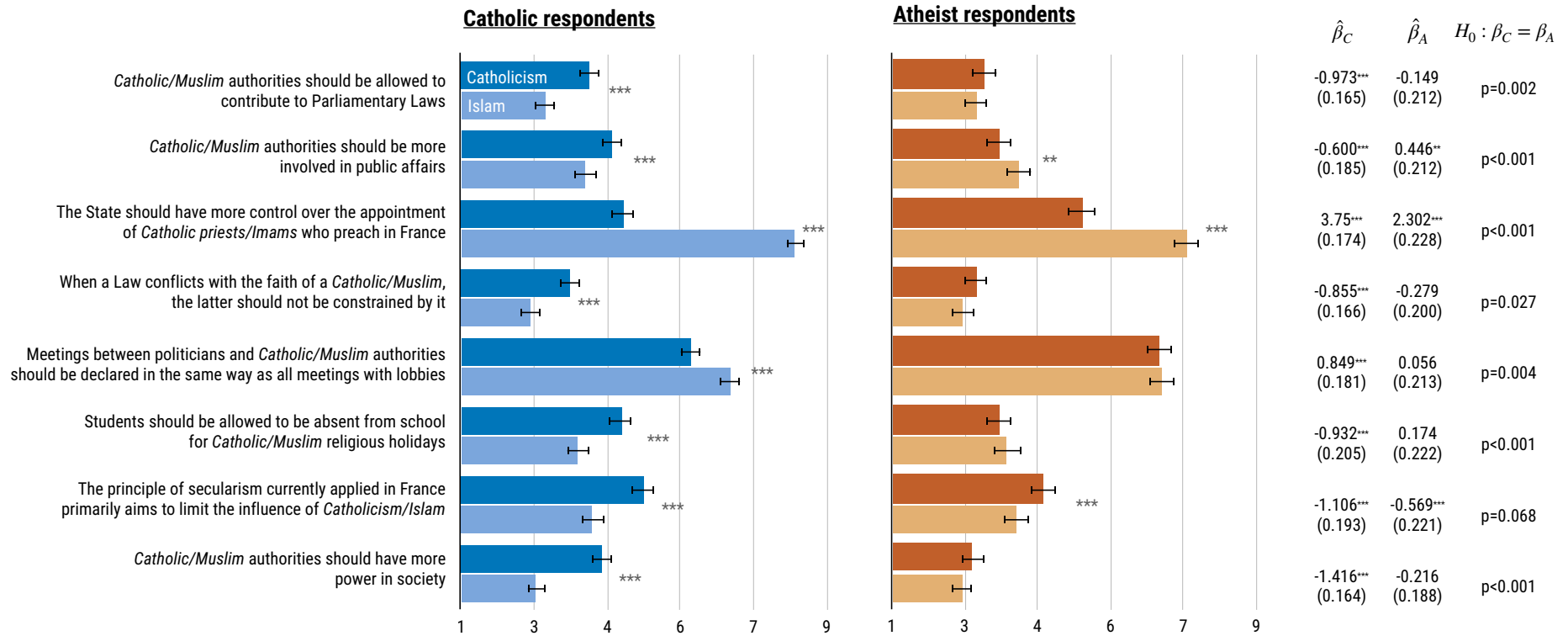
Catholics are found to be more supportive of the involvement of religious authorities in the public sphere when asked about Catholicism as compared to Islam. They are more in favor of an active role for Catholic authorities in lawmaking and public debate. They are also more sympathetic to the idea that religious practice and faith should prevail over Laws when the religion is Catholicism compared to Islam. The differences between the Catholic and Muslim versions of the questionnaire are statistically significant for all of the questions asked to Catholics. The gap regarding the control of the appointment of clerics by the State is particularly large. Catholics are significantly more likely to approve of the secular control of Imams than of Catholic Priests. Catholics are also more likely to approve of the idea that secularism should limit the influence of Islam compared to Catholicism. Overall, these results suggest that Catholics are more in favor of secularism when it comes to Islam than to Catholicism.

Second, there are no differences between the Catholic and Muslim versions of the questionnaire for Atheists, except that they are more likely to support State control of the nomination of religious leaders when it comes to Islam than to Catholicism. Unlike Catholics, Atheists favor the equal application of secularism to both religions.

Third, there is a significantly larger religious bias from Catholics than from Atheists. Compared to Atheists, Catholics respond significantly more in favor of the involvement of Catholic authorities in the public sphere than Muslim authorities (see the responses to the first, second, fifth, and eighth questions in Figure 4). Secularism is viewed in two ways. Compared to Atheists, Catholics are less supportive of secularism regarding Catholicism, but defend secularism as a way of limiting the influence of Islam in society. These results echo the large literature in sociology and political sciences on the appropriation of secularism by Catholics to limit the influence of Islam (Barthélemy and Michelat, 2007; Portier, 2018; Raynaud, 2019).¹²

¹²Barthélemy and Michelat (2007) surveyed 1,524 French adults on their attitudes towards *laïcité*. In particular, replies to the question "Is *laïcité* in France, nowadays, threatened?" reveal that Islam is perceived as the main threat to *laïcité* (56 percent of respondents), before religious intolerance at school (51 percent of respondents). Among respondents who declare being attached to *laïcité*, Barthélemy and Michelat (2007) find that respondents declaring some Catholic identification are more likely to say that only Islam threatens *laïcité*, rather than both Catholicism and Islam. Our results are in line with these findings, but our random assignment allows us to assess the effect of religion on the difference of opinions regarding secularism for Islam and Catholicism.

Figure 4: Opinions of a representative French adult sample (Catholics and Atheists) regarding religion and the public sphere.



Note: The treatment is that one half of the sample are presented with the "Catholic" statements and the other half with the "Muslim" statements. The sample consists of 759 Atheists and 1,004 Catholics. The scores are on a 1-to-10 Likert scale. Weighted means and standard errors use the polling institute's sample weights for representativeness. The p-values come from a weighted linear model with robust standard errors (in parentheses). Stars indicate significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

3 The Catholic factor in voting and cultural behaviors

The above discussion showed that while the secular divide that appeared during the French Revolution is still seen in current religious practice in France, Catholics' opposition to secularization has disappeared. However, numerous surveys still underline significant differences in political behavior between Catholics and the rest of the French. We now explore whether the divide continues to affect political behavior, and whether it can be seen in dimensions other than secularism.

3.1 Differences in political affiliation and voting behaviors between Catholics and non-Catholics

We first assess whether Catholics and Atheists differ in their support for political parties, using data from the 2017 French Electoral Study.¹³ This survey took place after the 2017 French Presidential elections and addressed the relationship of voters to politics and electoral decisions. It includes questions on respondents' public-policy preferences and values.

In Figure 5, we show the average support of Atheists and Catholics for political parties (ordered on a Left-Right axis) during the 2017 Presidential elections. There are strong and statistically-significant differences between French Atheists and Catholics. This gap is in particular significant on the Left-wing part of the political spectrum, and is the largest for the Extreme Left-wing party *La France Insoumise*. Atheists report more support for this party than do Catholics. They are also closer to *Europe Ecologie Les Verts*. By contrast, Catholics feel closer to Right-wing parties than do Atheists. Catholics express more support for the Centre-Right party *La République en Marche*, and the gap is larger for *Les Républicains*. However, there is no significant difference between Atheists and Catholics in their support for the Extreme-Right party *Le Rassemblement National* (see also Table A6 for details).

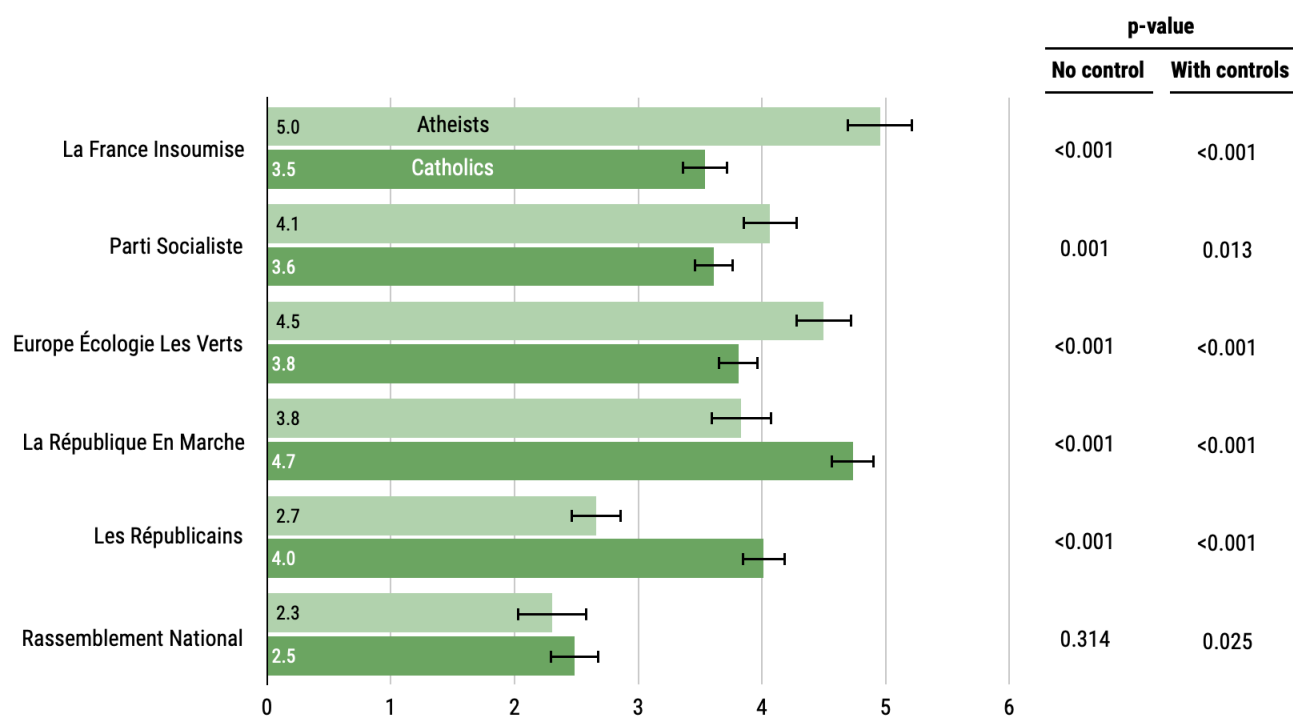
Second, these differences in support for political parties translate into different voting behaviors between Catholics and Atheists. Figure 6 shows the shares of votes of Catholics and Atheists in the first round of the 2017 Presidential elections. The results are similar to those for support above. Regarding the vote in favor of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the candidate of *La France Insoumise*, the gap is significant: 31.1% of Atheists against 13.4% of Catholics supported the Left-wing candidate. At the Right-wing spectrum, the gap is reversed and also significant: 29.9% Catholics against 10.1% atheists voted for François Fillon, the *Les Républicains* party candidate. In contrast, voting behaviors in favor of Emmanuel Macron from *La République en Marche* are not significantly different.

3.2 How are Political Parties' secularism positions perceived?

We now investigate how the different parties are perceived regarding their position on secularism. We above found that Catholics exhibit a significant religious bias regarding the way in which the State should interact with religions, so that we expect political parties to be differentiated in this

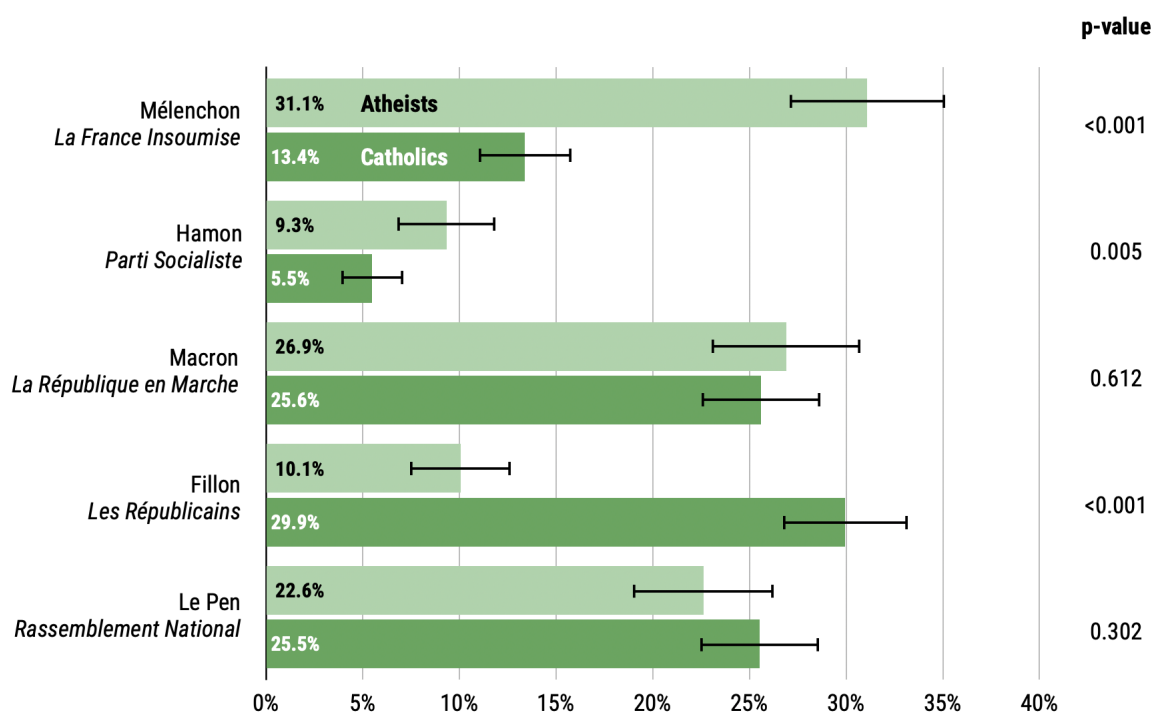
¹³For details, see <https://cdsp.sciences-po.fr/fr/ressources-en-ligne/ressource/fr.cdsp.ddi.FES2017/> and Gougou and Sauger (2017).

Figure 5: Affiliation with political parties during the 2017 French Presidential elections.



Note: The sample consists of 594 Atheists and 1,080 Catholics. Weighted proportions and standard errors use the database sample weights for representativeness. P-values obtained from a weighted linear model estimation with robust standard errors. The controls are age, occupation, education, retirement, and gender. Source: Post Electoral Studies.

Figure 6: Voting behaviors for the five main candidates in the first round of the 2017 French Presidential elections.



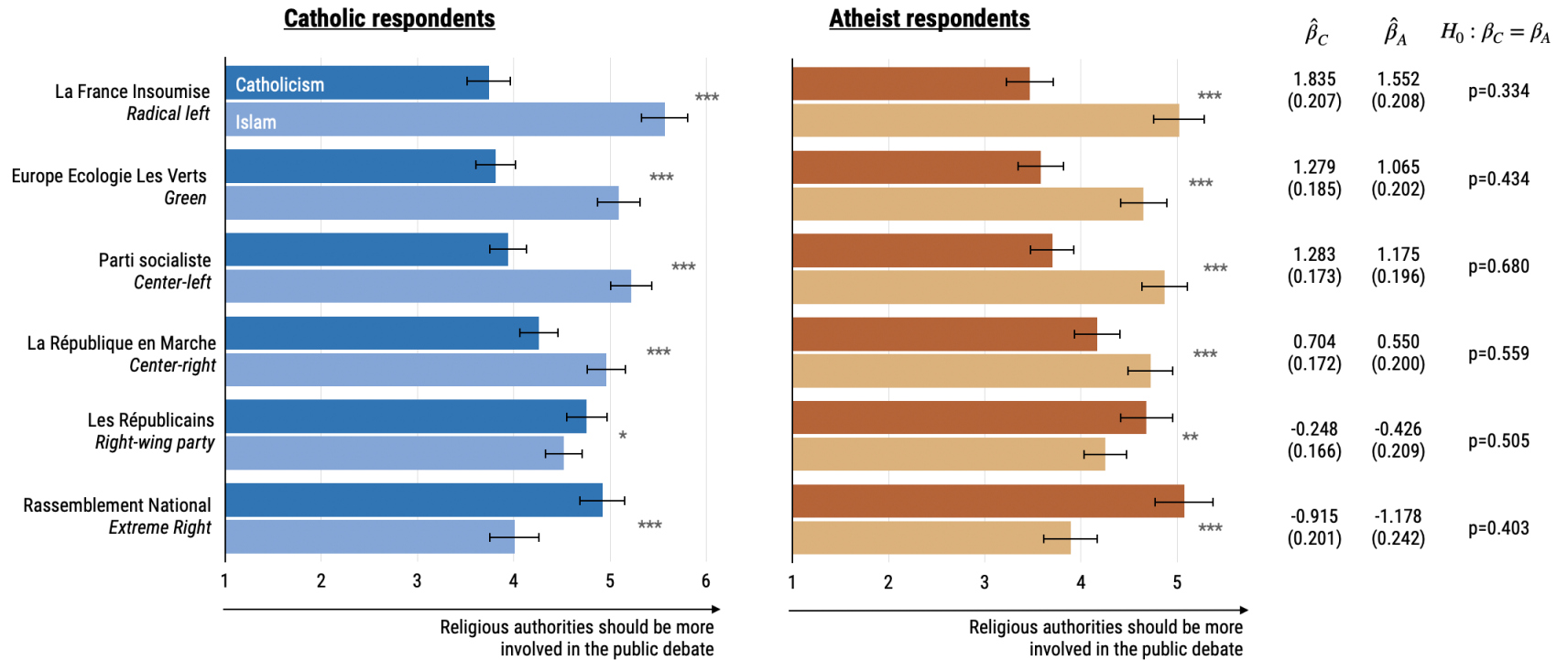
Note: The sample of respondents who voted for one of the five main candidates in the first round of the 2017 French Presidential elections consists of 510 Atheists and 775 Catholics. Weighted proportions and standard errors use the polling institute's sample weights for representativeness. The p-values come from a weighted probit estimation with robust standard errors.

dimension. Our December 2020 online survey of French adults asked about perceptions of the main political parties' stances on the involvement of religious authorities in public debates.

The results appear in Figure 7. There are no statistically-significant differences between the perceptions of Catholics and Atheists of the difference in treatment between the two religions ($H_0 : \beta_C = \beta_A$, p-values > 0.334). While this does not mean that Catholics and Atheists have similar views about party positions for each religion, they do have similar views about the *differences* in these positions between the two religions for each political party.

Overall, Catholics and Atheists say that Left-wing parties, from the Extreme-Left *La France Insoumise*, the ecology party *Europe Ecologie Les Verts* to the Socialists, but also the Center-Right majoritarian party *La République en Marche*, leave more room for Muslim rather than Catholic authorities in public debates. This perceived positional gap in favor of Islam is significant for both Catholics and Atheists. In contrast, both Catholics and Atheists perceive the historical Right-wing party *Les Républicains* and the Extreme-Right *Rassemblement National* to be more supportive of the participation of Catholic than Muslim authorities in public debate. The perceived position of political parties on secularism is in line with the differences in voting behaviors in Figure 6.

Figure 7: The perceived position of each political party with regard to the implication of Catholic / Muslim authorities in public debates.



Note: The treatment is that one half of the sample are presented with "Catholic" statements, and the other half "Muslim" statements. The sample consists of 759 Atheists and 1,004 Catholics. The scores are on a 1-to-10 Likert scale. Weighted means and standard errors use the polling institute's sample weights for representativeness. The p-values come from a weighted linear model with robust standard errors (in parentheses). Stars indicate significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

3.3 The Cultural Divide between Catholics and non-Catholics

Although Catholics seem to adhere to the principles of *laïcité*, French Catholics' and Atheists' views on social and political matters continue to diverge. In recent years, the Catholic Church has taken repeated positions against liberal reforms on social matters. In 2012, the Roman Catholic Church devoted an unprecedented amount of resources in opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples. More recently, in 2019-2020, the Catholic Church lobbied strongly against the extension of assisted reproductive technology to lesbian couples. The Catholic Church also strongly opposed legal developments in favor of assisted suicide.¹⁴ Regarding women's rights, the Catholic Church continues to lobby against abortion.

The opposition of the Church to these reforms is not only limited to the institution itself but is also found at the individual level, with notable differences between Catholics and Atheists. As an illustration, we use data from the *French Electoral Study* on cultural attitudes and practices. Controlling for socio-demographics, the 2017 survey data do indeed show that Catholics hold statistically-different views from Atheists (see Table A7). Catholics are significantly less likely than Atheists to consider homosexuality as an acceptable way of living one's sexual life ($p < 0.001$). Regarding the role of women in society, Catholics are also more likely to think that women are made to have children and raise them before anything else ($p < 0.001$). These differences in cultural attitudes come with different views about what it means to be French. Catholics attach more importance than Atheists to adhesion to French customs and traditions. Catholics are also more inclined to say that it is important to have French ancestry to be part of the national community ($p < 0.001$), that migrants represent a threat to French culture ($p < 0.001$), and that migrants should adapt to French customs and traditions ($p < 0.001$). Interestingly, Catholics appear in between Atheists and Muslims when it comes to homosexual and women's rights, with Muslims having significantly more-conservative views on these topics. In contrast, they express divergent opinions about cultural integration. Muslims disagree that it is important to follow French customs ($p < 0.001$), that French origins are a prerequisite to being truly French ($p < 0.001$), and that migrants are a threat to French culture ($p < 0.001$).

4 Conclusion

We here investigated the long-run evolution of French Catholics' views on State secularization and, more generally, their political preferences related to religion. We showed that the divide between secular and Catholic France that emerged during the French Revolution persisted in votes regarding emblematic secularization Laws that took place over a century later. We also found that the French schooling system that emerged at the beginning of the 19th Century and allowed for religious (mostly Catholic) and secular schools was rooted in the opposition between Catholics and Republicans. We provided some evidence that the unequal enrollment in religious (mostly Catholic) schools in France

¹⁴https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/le-pape-condamne-le-suicide-assiste-avant-une-decision-judiciaire-20-09-2019-2336871_24.php.

observed from the mid-19th Century up until recently likely perpetuated the gap between Catholic and Republican *Départements* that appeared during the French Revolution. This partition between Catholic and secular schools helped contribute to the opposition of Catholics to secularism for almost two centuries.

Although the geographical Church-State political divide that emerged with the Civil Constitution of the Clergy during the French Revolution is still correlated with current Catholic practices, we also showed that French Catholics have become more supportive of secularism. However, in a survey experiment on a representative French sample, Catholics are more likely to support *laïcité* principles when it comes to regulating Islam. In addition, the greater acceptance of *laïcité* principles by Catholics did not lead to a convergence of political opinions with Atheists. As far as non-extreme parties are concerned, Catholics are more likely to vote for Right- rather than Left-wing parties, while the opposite holds for Atheists. The perceived position of political parties on secularism (especially in the way parties treat Catholicism and Islam) could explain these differences in voting behavior between Catholics and Atheists. Last, we also showed that, beyond political votes, Catholics still differ significantly from Atheists in terms of values (homosexual rights, women's rights, French values, etc.).

Competing Interests. The authors declare no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics Information. This work complies with all relevant ethical regulations for research with human participants. All of the participants were recruited through a representative sampling survey company called OpinionWay and were compensated financially by the survey company for their participation in accordance with local standard rates.

Code and data availability. The data and codes to replicate the paper are available here:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14204854>

It does not contain the CNESCO data as the authors were asked not to make it public.

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Appendix A: Additional tables

Table A1: Description of the variables used to define the *Religiosity Index*.

Variable	Description	Source
<i>Baptisms</i>	Number of baptized children (under age 7) divided by the number of births in 2013.	La Croix
<i>Private</i>	Proportion of elementary students registered in private schools in 2013.	Ministry of Education
<i>Confirmation</i>	Number of <i>confirmations</i> per ten thousand inhabitants in 2013.	La Croix
<i>Priests</i>	Number of Priests per ten thousand inhabitants in 2013.	La Croix
<i>Diacres</i>	Number of <i>Diacres</i> per ten thousand inhabitant in 2013.	La Croix
<i>Marriage</i>	Number of marriages celebrated at church in 2013 divided by the number of heterosexual marriages in 2013.	La Croix & INSEE

Table A2: Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the *Religiosity Index* (calculated at the *Département* level).

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	N
<i>Baptisms</i>	0.407	0.119	0.09	0.754	88
<i>Private</i>	0.132	0.100	0.04	0.495	88
<i>Confirmation</i>	6.76	5.56	0.556	42.0	88
<i>Priests</i>	1.05	0.599	0.230	3.57	88
<i>Diacres</i>	0.464	0.239	0.122	2.10	88
<i>Marriage</i>	0.310	0.097	0.046	0.598	88

Table A3: Correlation matrix between the variables used in the *Religiosity Index*.

	Baptisms	Private	Confirmation	Priests	Diacres	Marriage
Baptisms	.					
Private	0.344***	.				
Confirmation	0.167	0.429***	.			
Priests	0.505***	0.517***	0.618***	.		
Diacres	0.424***	0.383***	0.471***	0.499***	.	
Marriage	0.780***	0.295***	0.0080	0.218**	0.221**	.

The stars indicate the significance levels: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table A4: Results (Eigenfactors) of the Principal Component Analysis defining the *Religiosity Index*.

Variable	Comp. 1	Comp. 2	Comp. 3	Comp. 4	Comp. 5	Comp. 6
Baptisms	0.4392	0.4778	-0.1498	-0.1886	-0.1428	-0.7074
Private	0.4069	-0.1321	0.7618	0.4701	-0.0545	-0.1124
Confirmation	0.3703	-0.5124	-0.0448	-0.3496	0.6736	-0.1495
Priests	0.4721	-0.2316	0.0131	-0.4730	-0.5958	0.3803
Diacres	0.4144	-0.1672	-0.6240	0.6286	-0.0442	0.1178
Marriage	0.3315	0.6404	0.0750	-0.0489	0.4073	0.5533
Eigenvalue	2.991	1.378	.632	.504	.357	.138
Variance explained	0.499	0.230	0.105	0.0840	0.060	0.023

Table A5: Regression of the indicators of Catholic practices in 2013 on the proportion of non-sworn priests in 1791 and economic control variables.

	Religiosity	Baptisms	Private School	Confirmation	Priests	Diacres	Marriages
Non-sworn priests	2.617*** (0.728)	7.609* (4.076)	0.203*** (0.0434)	8.248*** (2.814)	0.773*** (0.282)	0.166 (0.131)	0.0187 (0.0365)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	74	74	74	74	74	74	74
R-squared	0.397	0.532	0.450	0.214	0.308	0.118	0.451

Notes: The figures here are the estimated coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The stars indicate the significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. The controls are the unemployment rate, interdecile wealth ratio, median level of income and size of the population aged 15 and over (in logs).

Table A6: Regression of the affiliation with each political party in 2017 on religion and socio-demographic variables.

	LFI	PS	EELV	LREM	LR	FN
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Atheist	Reference group					
Catholic	-0.974*** (0.169)	-0.338** (0.145)	-0.481*** (0.147)	0.666*** (0.153)	1.263*** (0.150)	0.392** (0.171)
Protestant	-1.234** (0.559)	-1.095** (0.477)	-0.601 (0.483)	-0.470 (0.509)	1.464*** (0.495)	1.102** (0.562)
Jewish	-0.630 (1.814)	-1.217 (1.341)	-2.666* (1.370)	-1.189 (1.657)	0.225 (1.390)	-1.114 (1.600)
Muslim	1.529*** (0.393)	0.711** (0.335)	0.522 (0.349)	1.969*** (0.357)	-0.258 (0.356)	-2.149*** (0.391)
Other Religion	-0.0350 (0.587)	-1.021** (0.496)	0.665 (0.507)	0.0949 (0.530)	-0.0647 (0.515)	-0.118 (0.592)
Sample weights	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1,714	1,730	1,729	1,735	1,718	1,765
R ²	0.116	0.053	0.058	0.126	0.084	0.128

Notes: The figures here are the estimated coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The stars indicate the significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. The controls are age, occupation, education, gender, and retirement status.

Table A7: Regression of attitudes in 2017 on religion.

	Gay acceptable	Women at home	Follow customs	French ancestry	Migrants threat	Minorities adapt
Atheist	Reference group					
Catholic	-0.395*** (0.0687)	0.353*** (0.0724)	0.361*** (0.0612)	0.302*** (0.0590)	-0.230*** (0.0595)	0.266*** (0.0595)
Protestant	-0.997*** (0.244)	0.428* (0.236)	0.243 (0.207)	0.144 (0.198)	-0.428** (0.213)	0.635*** (0.181)
Jewish	0.00748 (0.603)	-3.966*** (0.142)	-0.310 (0.251)	0.227 (0.421)	-0.575 (0.582)	0.804 (0.528)
Muslim	-1.041*** (0.168)	0.603*** (0.164)	-0.731*** (0.142)	-0.833*** (0.143)	0.922*** (0.157)	-0.416** (0.166)
Other Religion	-0.291 (0.259)	0.457** (0.224)	0.172 (0.234)	-0.214 (0.172)	0.123 (0.212)	-0.0321 (0.207)
Sample weights	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1,745	1,811	1,808	1,815	1,793	1,803

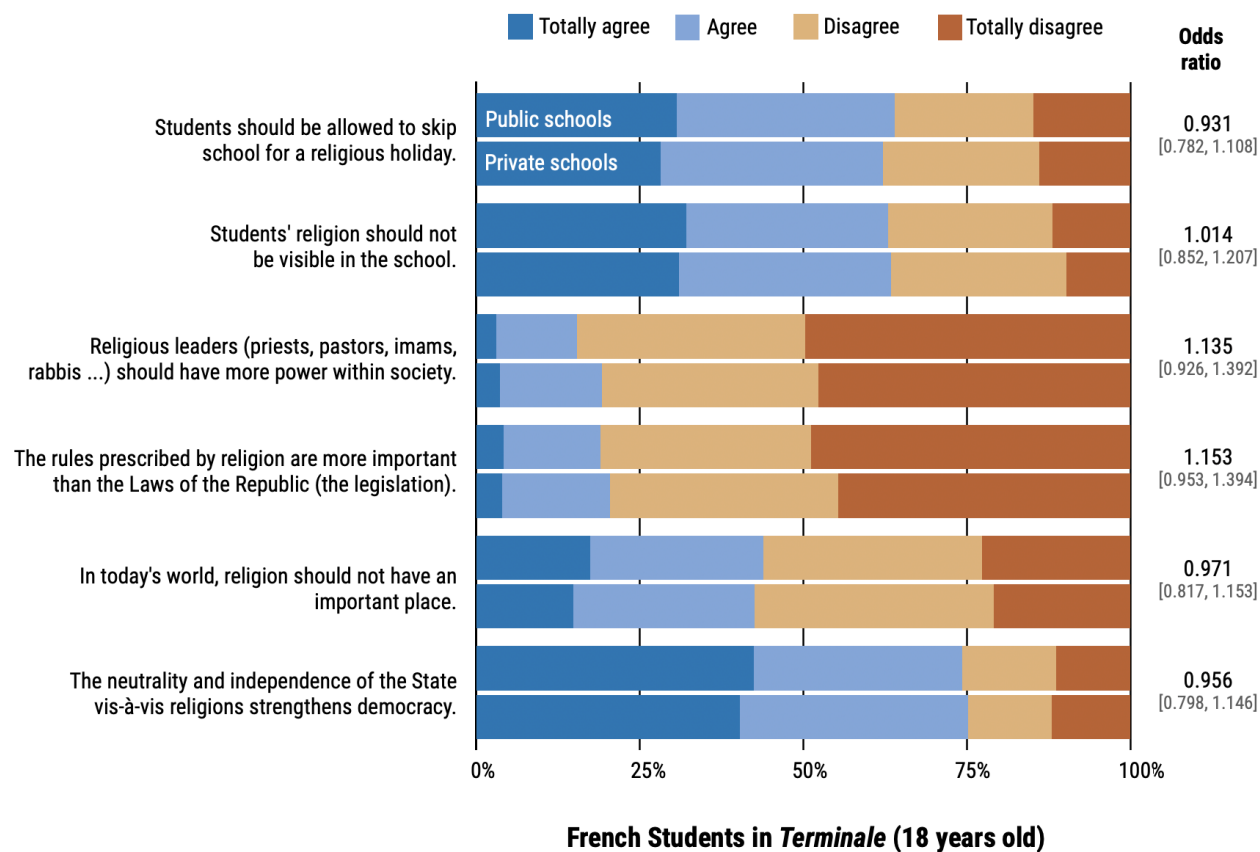
Notes: The figures here are the estimated coefficients, with standard errors in parentheses. The stars indicate the significance levels: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. The controls are age, occupation, education, and retirement status. These are weighted ordered probit regressions with robust standard errors. Source: Post Electoral Studies.

Original questions:

- *Gay acceptable*: Homosexuality is an acceptable way to experience one's sexuality.
- *Women at home*: Women are made above all to have children and raise them.
- *Follow customs*: It is important to follow French customs and traditions.
- *French ancestry*: It is important to have French origins to be truly French.
- *Migrants threat*: In general, French culture is threatened by immigrants.
- *Minorities adapt*: Minorities should adapt to French customs and traditions.

Appendix B: Additional Figures

Figure B1: The opinions of French 18 year-old students about the relationship between religion and the State (CNESCO)



Note: Frequencies are weighted by sample weights calculated by the CNESCO statistical team. The odds ratios come from weighted ordered logit estimations with robust standard errors. The associated 95% confidence intervals appear in brackets. The sample consists of 5,584 students from public schools and 1,019 students from private schools. Source: CNESCO.

Appendix C: The secularization Laws of the Third Republic (1870-1940)

1. Law of 28th March 1882: During the beginning of the Third Republic, the Centrist government implemented a series of Laws that established mandatory and secular free education. The Jules Ferry laws, named after the Minister of Public Instruction, were strongly opposed by the Catholic Church. The Law of 16th June 1881 made schooling free and public. The 1882 Law made primary schooling mandatory and secular. It asserted the neutrality of the French State in religious matters, and aimed to separate the public sphere from the private sphere where religion is circumscribed. Specifically, the teaching of “civic and moral instruction” replaced the teaching of religion. 461 of the 667 elected Deputies of the National Assembly voted, with 334 votes for and 127 against.
2. Law of 27th July 1884 on divorce re-legalization: During the French Revolution, the National Assembly adopted the Law of 20th September 1792 authorizing divorce. Under the reign of the French King Louis XVIII, monarchists advocating that divorce was a revolutionary heritage abrogated it by the Law of 8th May 1816. The 27th July 1884 law, called the Naquet law after the Deputy and Senator of the *Vaucluse Département* who promoted it, was approved at the National Assembly by 355 to 115 votes. Re-legalization amounted to authorizing divorce if one partner was proved to be at fault. In particular, the plaintiff could draw a pension in addition to child care.
3. Law of 30th October 1886 called the Goblet Law: this followed on from the 1882 Law by appointing only secular teachers in public schools. Teachers from *congrégations*, which are Catholic orders of monks and nuns, were progressively replaced by secular teachers. There were 362 votes for the Law, over twice as many as the 178 votes against.
4. Law of 1st July 1901 on associations: this introduced strict conditions for the existence of *congrégations* that provided most of the teachers in Catholic schools. 305 Deputies voted for the Law, and 225 against.
5. Law of 7th July 1904 on the abolition of education provided by congregations: under this Law congregations were no longer allowed to be involved in the education of pupils. 547 Deputies out of 656 voted, with 306 votes in favor and 241 against.
6. Law of 9th December 1905 on the separation of the Church and the State: this Law confirmed the neutrality of the French State in religious matters. The Law proclaimed freedom of conscience, guaranteed free public worship, and ended State subsidies for the Church. In particular, Church ministers were no longer paid by the State. Church property had been nationalized since the 1789 French Revolution, and under the 1905 Law the State would draw up an inventory of the Church’s wealth and could give it back some of the property required for public worship. The 1905 Law caused sharp tensions between Catholics and Republicans, and was strongly condemned by Pope Pius X in the *Vehementer nos* encyclical. There were 341 votes for the Law and 233 against. This 1905 Law established the *laïcité* principles that are still in force today.

Appendix D: Online survey experiment: Instructions

Note: The text that reflects the treatment variation is displayed in italics.

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? Give a score from 1 to 10, where 1 means that you strongly disagree and 10 means you strongly agree, with intermediate scores used to qualify your opinion.

- Religion should remain a private matter.
- It is important that schools can provide religious education.
- Religious education is a matter for families and religious authorities, moral instruction for school.
- Secularism is an essential pillar of peaceful cohabitation in France.
- The State should not provide benefits to individuals due to their religious practices.
- Secularism is mainly used as a weapon by the State against religions.

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? Give a score from 1 to 10, where 1 means that you strongly disagree and 10 means you strongly agree, with intermediate scores used to qualify your opinion.

- *Catholic/Muslim* authorities should be allowed to contribute to Parliamentary Laws.
- *Catholic/Muslim* authorities should be more involved in public affairs.
- The State should have more control over the appointment of *Catholic priests/Imams* who preach in France.
- When a Law conflicts with the faith of a *Catholic/Muslim*, the latter should not be constrained by it.
- Meetings between politicians and *Catholic/Muslim* authorities should be declared in the same way as all meetings with lobbies.
- Students should be allowed to be absent from school for *Catholic/Muslim* religious holidays.
- The principle of secularism currently applied in France primarily aims to limit the influence of *Catholicism/Islam*.
- *Catholic/Muslim* authorities should have more power in society.

On a scale from 1 to 10, what is the position of each of these political parties with regard to the involvement of *Catholic/Muslim* authorities in public debates? 1 means that the political party is against the involvement of *Catholic/Muslim* authorities in public debates, and 10 means that it is strongly in favor of *Catholic/Muslim* authorities in public debates.

- La France Insoumise (LFI)
- Europe Écologie Les Verts (EELV)
- Le Parti Socialiste (PS)
- La République En Marche (LREM)
- Les Républicains (LR)
- Le Rassemblement National (RN)